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NAXOS

SEATTLE SYMPHONY
COLLECTION

Igor
STRAVINSKY

The Firebird
Complete Ballet
Fireworks

Seattle Symphony
Gerard Schwarz

Igor
STRAVINSKY
(1882–1971)

	The Firebird (complete ballet)	47:18
1	Introduction	2:37
2	Night. Kastchei's Enchanted Garden	1:51
3	The Firebird enters, pursued by Ivan Tsarevitch	2:29
4	The Firebird's Dance	1:18
5	Ivan Tsarevitch captures the Firebird	0:54
6	The Firebird begs to be released – Entrance of the Thirteen Enchanted Princesses	8:12
7	The Princesses play with the golden apples (Scherzo) – Ivan Tsarevitch appears	3:36
8	The Princesses' Khorovod (Round Dance)	5:06
9	Daybreak – Ivan Tsarevitch enters Kastchei's palace	1:27
10	Magic carillon, the capture of Ivan Tsarevitch – Entrance of Kastchei the Immortal – Dialogue between Kastchei and Ivan Tsarevitch – The Princesses plead for mercy – The Firebird enters	5:34
11	Dance of Kastchei's retinue under the Firebird's magic spell	0:45
12	Infernal Dance of Kastchei and his subjects under the Firebird's magic spell	4:41
13	The Firebird's Lullaby – Kastchei awakens – Kastchei's death – Deep darkness	5:28
14	Kastchei's spell is broken, and the Petrified Knights return to life – General thanksgiving	3:20
15	Fireworks, Op. 4	4:24

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) The Firebird (complete ballet); Fireworks

Achieving fame and stature as a composer requires both skill and luck. Certainly a deep knowledge of music and talent for expressing new ideas with it are essential. But there have been countless gifted composers whose careers have faltered, or have failed to develop as they might have, for lack of opportunity at a critical moment. In this respect, Igor Stravinsky was unusually fortunate. Having patiently mastered the craft of composition, he was ready and able to seize a singular opportunity when it came his way.

Stravinsky was born in 1882 into a musical family. His father, Feodor Stravinsky, was a celebrated opera singer whose home in St Petersburg, the Russian capital, offered ideal circumstances for cultivating a native musical aptitude. As a boy Stravinsky often heard his father practising, and he regularly attended both rehearsals and performances of operas and ballets at the famed Mariinsky Theatre, where the elder Stravinsky sang. At the age of nine Igor began piano studies. There followed lessons in harmony and counterpoint, but the most valuable part of his training began in 1903, when he began regular lessons with Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, the most esteemed Russian composer of the day.

Rimsky-Korsakov was deeply knowledgeable about the art of orchestration, and his instruction instilled in his new student a keen awareness of instrumental colour and texture. Under his tutelage Stravinsky produced his first significant compositions, a pair of short tone poems titled *Scherzo fantastique* and *Fireworks*. The latter piece, especially, featured scintillating orchestral effects, and its first public performance, in St Petersburg early in 1909, would change the course of Stravinsky's career and, to a considerable degree, of music in the twentieth century. For among those attending the concert was

Sergey Dyagilev, an art critic who had taken it upon himself to introduce new Russian music and dance to the West.

Dyagilev already had organized concerts and opera performances in Paris. The success of those ventures led him to establish a troupe of Russian artists in the French capital. Dyagilev's ambition was to make the *Ballets russes* – the "Russian Ballet," as he called this company – a vehicle for creating and presenting innovative work, and to this end he set about commissioning choreographers, composers and designers to produce new pieces. Impressed by Stravinsky's music, Dyagilev asked him to orchestrate some piano pieces to accompany ballet scenes. The composer acquitted this task well, and Dyagilev soon turned to him with a far more important task. The *Ballets russes* was preparing a new ballet based on a Russian folk tale, but Anatol Lyadov, the composer selected to write the music, announced that he could not deliver the score on time. Stravinsky seized the opportunity thus presented, writing the required music during the winter of 1909-10.

The Firebird was performed in Paris by the *Ballets russes* in June 1910, and its success thrust Stravinsky from relative obscurity to celebrity almost overnight. It also marked the start of a long and fruitful partnership with Dyagilev. Stravinsky became the principal composer for the *Ballets russes*, and in this capacity he wrote a series of ballet and opera scores that would form the core of his output.

The Firebird relates a fantastic story centered on the mythical hero Ivan, son of the Czar. Wandering alone in a deep wood, this Russian prince comes upon a magical creature, the fabled Firebird. His daring enables him to capture the Firebird, but when she offers a magic feather as ransom, he frees her. Continuing on his way, Prince Ivan encounters a

group of thirteen princesses, who have come under the spell of Kastchei, a demon of terrible dark powers. Following the princesses to Kastchei's castle, Ivan soon finds himself captured. But he remembers the feather the Firebird has given him, and its magic renders his captors helpless. The Firebird arrives and shows the prince an egg containing Kastchei's soul. Ivan smashes it, destroying Kastchei and freeing his prisoners.

Stravinsky's music relates much of this narrative in colorful sonorities. The initial moments suggest Prince Ivan wandering through the woods and happening upon Kastchei's enchanted garden. Stravinsky creates an air of danger and mystery with circling figures in the low strings punctuated by menacing horn figures, and intensifies the atmosphere with glissando harmonics (the eerie, sliding sonorities played by the strings). His encounter with the Firebird brings music conjuring a truly fantastic and colorful creature. The next scene shows the captive princesses, who are playing with golden apples. Stravinsky depicts their game in an effervescent scherzo. A horn solo marks the arrival of Prince Ivan, who watches as they perform a gentle round dance to a song-like melody initially presented by oboe over harp accompaniment.

At dawn the next day, Ivan makes his way to Kastchei's palace, his approach marked by nervous trumpet signals. There he comes upon a magical carillon, whose playing is suggested through virtuoso orchestral music. Kastchei's guards take the prince prisoner, and their master arrives to sinister sounds from brass and percussion. The princesses attempt to intercede on Ivan's behalf, their pleas heard as gentle phrases for violin and woodwinds. Kastchei is unrelenting, but the Firebird's magic feather protects Ivan until the Firebird herself appears. She uses her magic to turn the attack of Kastchei's demons into an "Infernal Dance," fierce but harmless.

Soon the Firebird lulls Kastchei and his demons to sleep with a haunting lullaby. Ivan smashes the egg containing Kastchei's soul, and soft tremolo figures

in the strings indicate the demise of the demon and the end of his magic. The princesses and knights held captive by Kastchei's spells are released, as a melody announced by the horn gradually spreads to the entire orchestra and builds to a sonorous climax in the final measures.

The Firebird was Stravinsky's first major composition, and it established the musical foundation for his subsequent works. Its importance in this respect is easily overlooked, since *The Firebird* exemplifies a Russian Impressionism whose debts of influence to Rimsky-Korsakov and Debussy are apparent. But the melodic idiom, the asymmetrical rhythms and phrase lengths, and the bold use of the orchestra became hallmarks of Stravinsky's coming work. He would extend them in highly inventive fashion with his next major compositions, the ballets *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*. *The Firebird* marked the end of Stravinsky's initial development as a composer, but it pointed to the future also.

As mentioned earlier, it was a performance of Stravinsky's *Fireworks* (along with his *Scherzo fantastique*) that first gave Dyagilev a glimpse of the composer's genius. Stravinsky completed *Fireworks* in about six weeks during the summer of 1908 and eagerly sent it to Rimsky-Korsakov. But instead of his teacher's comments, as he expected, Stravinsky received a telegram informing him of his mentor's death.

Though Stravinsky did not write the piece as an homage, *Fireworks* nevertheless pays tribute to his teacher. It is a brilliant showpiece, and it shares the penchant for vibrant instrumental color that characterises Rimsky-Korsakov's music. The work's atmospheric opening gives rise to rapid figures for the winds, and the music builds in volume and intensity. Somewhat surprising here is Stravinsky's resort to imitative counterpoint in developing his ideas. Rimsky-Korsakov had little interest in this aspect of composition and even sent Stravinsky to an assistant for counterpoint lessons. Those lessons were well

learned, however, and contrapuntal writing would remain an important feature of Stravinsky's work throughout his career.

Soon the tempo slows for a passage featuring a melody for English horn and, later, a lyrical theme given out over rippling accompaniment. Following a reprise of the opening material, Stravinsky again turns to canonic counterpoint, though not in the manner

of a dry exercise. Rather, the tightly knit echoes produce virtual explosions of sound – something entirely consistent with the title and conception of the piece – in the work's closing paragraph.

Paul Schiavo

Gerard Schwarz



Gerard Schwarz serves as Music Director of the Eastern Music Festival and Conductor Laureate of the Seattle Symphony. A renowned interpreter of 19th-century German, Austrian and Russian repertoire in addition to contemporary American composers, Schwarz recently completed his final season as music director of the Seattle Symphony after an acclaimed 26 years. His previous positions as Music Director include New York's Mostly Mozart Festival, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the New York Chamber Symphony. As a guest conductor he has worked with many of the world's finest orchestras and opera companies. His discography of over 350 releases showcases his collaborations with the Seattle Symphony, the Berlin Radio Symphony, The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Czech Philharmonic, the London Symphony Orchestra and L'Orchestre National de France, among others. His pioneering recordings of American symphonists Diamond, Hanson, Hovhaness, Piston and William Schuman have received high critical praise, as have his cycles of works by Brahms, Mahler, Rimsky-Korsakov, Robert Schumann,

Shostakovich, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky and Wagner. Schwarz has received hundreds of honours and accolades including two Emmy Awards, 13 GRAMMY® nominations, six ASCAP Awards and numerous *Stereo Review* and *Ovation Awards*. He holds the Ditson Conductor's Award from Columbia University, was the first American named Conductor of the Year by *Musical America* and has received numerous honorary doctorates. The National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences gave Schwarz its first "IMPACT" lifetime achievement award.

Seattle Symphony

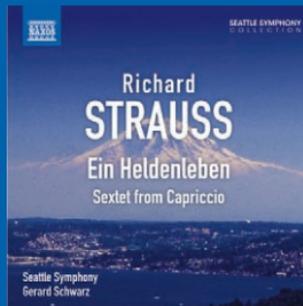


The Seattle Symphony, founded in 1903, has gained international prominence with more than 140 recordings, 12 GRAMMY® nominations, two Emmys and numerous other awards. Gerard Schwarz led the Orchestra from 1985 to 2011, and is now Conductor Laureate. The Seattle Symphony is internationally recognized for its innovative programming and extensive recording history. The orchestra performs in one of the world's finest concert venues – the acoustically superb Benaroya Hall – in downtown Seattle. Under the leadership of Music Director Ludovic Morlot since September 2011, the Symphony is heard live from September through July by more than 315,000 people. For more information on the Seattle Symphony, visit www.seattlesymphony.org.

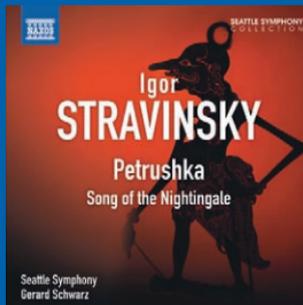
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The scintillating orchestral effects of *Fireworks* so impressed Sergey Dyagilev that the impresario was prompted to commission a new work from Stravinsky for his *Ballet russes*. Telling of Prince Ivan's fantastic adventures in the demonic Kاستchei's magic realm, *The Firebird* is a virtuoso composition in every regard; its colourful sonorities and dramatic impact brought Stravinsky instant celebrity and led to his successful ballets *Petrushka* (Naxos 8.571222) and *The Rite of Spring* (Naxos 8.571223). This recording has been acclaimed as "polished and brilliant" (*Gramophone*).



Igor
STRAVINSKY
(1882-1971)

The Firebird (1910) 47:18 **15 Fireworks, Op. 4 4:24**
Ballet in Two Scenes

1 Introduction

2-13 Scene 1

14 Scene 2

A full track list can be found on page 2 of the booklet

Seattle Symphony • Gerard Schwarz



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Adam Stern (*Fireworks*) • Recording Engineer: John M. Eargle

Associate Engineer: Al Swanson (*The Firebird*) • Assistant Engineers: Al Swanson,
Laura Wirthlin (*Fireworks*) • Production Associate: Phyllis Bernard

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